

Framework: Social Acts

Taking the perspective of others is an all important ability that determines how successful we are in our communication with others. Alex Gillespie, Associate Professor in Social Psychology at the London School of Economics and Political Science, theorizes that children learn to take the perspective of others when they experience the social positions within patterns of interaction or social acts (speaking/listening, buying/selling, winning/losing, giving/receiving, requesting/helping, attacking/defending, leading/following, questioning/answering, lending/borrowing, and commanding/obeying).

Perspective Taking in Games, Novels, and Movies

- In childhood we experience the position exchange that occurs in typical children's games. The child frequently changes social position in the game from actor to observer/receiver. (peek-a-boo; kiss/chase; cops/robbers; hiding/seeking; treasure hunting; buying/selling; feeding/being fed; giving/receiving; chasing/escaping; teaching/learning;) The child experiences what is involved as an actor in a situation. Then with position exchange, the child experiences what it is like to be the observer or receiver in an activity. This would include thoughts and emotions/feelings.

- Over time, a child learns to contemplate what the thinking or experience might be of the person in the opposite social position.

- The perspectives that we learn in children's play continue to develop as we immerse ourselves in adult activities. We anticipate and then monitor social acts and then speculate and draw conclusions about the thoughts and motives of others.

- In novels and movies we imagine what transpires in a fictional social act, relate it to real life, and accept or reject its validity.

- In a social act there is meaningful activity between the actor and observer/receiver. Language is connected to these social acts. Actors, actions, and observers/receivers are named. The social act can then be described and parties, actions, and related objects can be named.

- A pronoun is used to describe yourself as an actor or observer/receiver in a social act. As you exchange positions, pronouns and word order change to describe the social act accurately.

- After many repetitions of the games a child becomes adept at describing the social act he has participated in. He understands that different pronouns must be used to name the same person when positions are exchanged. He also learns to answer basic who, what, where, and how questions.

Strategies for Activities, Lessons, and Materials:

- Children can be given frequent opportunity to play the traditional childhood games of their culture that incorporate position exchange. An adult can monitor the play and encourage children to change positions.

- Provide the props and costumes that might encourage initiation of games.

- Adults can encourage children to talk about their play and model the language that accurately describes it.

- An adult can be the partner in the social act but take care to allow the child the opportunity to assume both positions.
- Encourage discussion about perspectives in novels and movies.

A person with autism or other developmental delay might:

- be reticent in participating in a social act.
- participate in a social act if it is initiated by the social partner.
- prefer to remain in the role of the observer or receiver of the social partner's actions.
- not know how to play the role of the actor in the social act.
- have difficulty using pronouns to describe the social act accurately.
- have difficulty describing the feelings that he experiences as actor or observer.
- have difficulty answering wh- questions about the social act.
- have little or no opportunity to participate in children's games with peers.
- be preoccupied with sensory sensitivities.
- lack assumed skill levels in related areas.

User Friendly Strategies for Activities, Lessons, and Materials:

- Partner with the person taking care to exchange positions frequently.
- Games can be taught using structured materials and prompts.
- An assistant can be used to prompt the child in the game.
- Peers can be chosen that are accommodating and understanding of the help that might be needed.
- Picture sequences and stories may help to prepare a person for play.
- Provide many opportunities to play each game.
- Take photos of a child engaged in a game, then use text to label each photo using pronouns that describe the actions.

- Observe and detect sensory sensitivities to materials and environment and alter as necessary.
- Observe carefully to detect competencies in order to know what they don't know.

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